

Minutes of the Meeting of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force held on 20 November 2017 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Peter Smith (Chair), Gerard Rice (Vice-Chair), John Allen, Roy Jones, Brian Little and Bukky Okunade

Matt Jackson, Thames Crossing Action Group Representative
Linda Mulley, Resident Representative
Peter Ward, Thurrock Business Representative

Apologies: Councillors Steve Liddiard and Terry Piccolo

In attendance: Lyn Carpenter, Chief Executive
Steve Cox, Corporate Director of Environment and Place
John Lamb, Interim Assistant Director - Lower Thames Crossing
Ian Wake, Director of Public Health
Helen Horrocks, Strategic Lead Commissioner for Public Health
Fred Raphael, Transport Development Manager
Charlotte Raper, Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

19. Minutes

The minutes of the Lower Thames Crossing Task Force meeting held on 16 October 2017 were approved as a correct record.

20. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

21. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Jones outlined that all Members of the Task Force had an interest of some kind.

22. Actions from Previous Meetings

Councillor Little had previously requested that Highways England include a form with their letters to residents which would allow them to indicate that they were happy for their Ward Councillors to be told they had been contacted. This would allow Ward Councillors to be more informed about the needs of specific residents within their Wards, regarding the proposed Lower Thames Crossing. He asked whether this had been done. Highways England stated

that this would have to be subject to legal review within the organisation. Councillor Little emphasised that a simple 'opt in' arrangement would satisfy all Data Protection requirements such that Thurrock might readily understand comments being received and support the process of inclusive consultation that Highways England had claimed.

The Chair noted that the Lower Thames Crossing Action Group Representative had requested data around the difference in Air Quality impact between the proposed route 3 and the A14 option. It was confirmed that, to date, this information had not been received from Highways England.

Councillor Jones highlighted that Highways England were not engaging regarding information and the general feeling within Thurrock was that the scheme would go ahead without engagement with local communities.

The Vice-Chair referred to previous enquiries regarding the elevated sections of the proposed design, and he hoped that this would be touched upon in the update from Highways England later in the meeting, as it was of great importance for local residents. The Highways England Representative expressed that he would be happy to touch on the issue but a higher level of detail would require more time than their allotted time for the presentation. He indicated that it would be beneficial to hold a longer meeting in future to allow for greater depth. Councillor Jones interjected that there had been no response regarding the elevated sections within Thurrock, yet the report showed there would be more scenic options such as cut-ins in Kent. He felt Thurrock was already being neglected and would be happy for the meeting to run longer if it meant that concerns and queries could be answered.

The Chair echoed that there was an overall feeling of frustration amongst Councillors, officers, the Thames Crossing Action Group and residents as it appeared that Highways England were failing in terms of communication. He hoped there would be improved responses moving forward, and proposed that Actions 1-10 be covered at the current meeting.

The Highways England Representative asked if there were any specific responses which required further expansion.

Councillor Little echoed his earlier comments around contact with residents. It was confirmed that Highways England held a database of everyone who contacted them regarding the scheme though it was not certain that this could be sifted. With regards to sharing details of land owners and residents whom Highways England had contacted it was a matter of data protection laws. The professional opinion of a legal expert would be sought and a response brought back to the Task Force. The suggestion of residents allowing their details to be shared would be considered as part of this. Councillor Little again emphasised the option of a simple 'opt in' approach that would help Thurrock and demonstrate that Highways England were undertaking meaningful consultation and consideration.

The response to Councillor Piccolo's previous query around traffic originating in or destined for Thurrock indicated that the information would be available soon. Councillor Jones asked, on behalf of Councillor Piccolo, whether there was any estimate of when the information would be available. The final traffic model would be shared with Officers from Thurrock Council in December, and once they were satisfied it could be shared on a wider scale. Councillor Jones expressed his amazement that Highways England did not possess this data already, given the scale of the proposal. The Highways England Representative clarified that the majority of the data was complete, but projected freight movements were still awaited from the Department of Transport and it would be pointless to share incomplete data. It was also confirmed that the data from 2001 had formed the baseline but was now complete up to 2016.

The Vice-Chair noted that whether the route would be four or six lanes was still being reviewed. Given that the application was due to be with the Planning Inspectorate in the near future he felt that the design should be at a stage where they knew one way or the other. He asked for details around the cost increase between 2-lane traffic and 3-lane traffic. The Task Force heard that the scheme had been developed from the preferred route announcement in April and would continue to undergo investigation and scrutiny, particularly during the public consultation. The Vice-Chair again queried how Highways England could make informed choices regarding the route and two or three lanes without a traffic model that worked.

23. Highways England Update: Scheme update and engagement & consultation

The representatives from Highways England presented their plans for consultation and engagement as the scheme progressed.

The Chair stressed that information should not only be shared digitally, elderly residents and others without access to the internet must receive information at the same time as others. Highways England stated they were keen to represent everyone and would do their best to ensure information would be sent in the best way, taking guidance from Thurrock Council, as information should be open for access to all. There were currently 250-300 interest groups, stakeholders and businesses to be contacted and 47,000 responses had been received at the options phase. The Chair requested the data from the 47,000 responses and noted that Thurrock Council had not received a copy of the consultation report. These responses covered all stakeholders for the scheme but, following discussions around legal issues, a response would come to the Task Force. As for the consultation report, it had been published on the Lower Thames Crossing website as part of the preferred route announcement.

Regarding interest groups, the Director of Public Health noted that there was no mention of health agencies. Public Health England were mentioned however it was expected that Local Authorities would engage with more localised health authorities. The Director of Public Health reiterated that

Highways England should be engaging with local hospitals, the Clinical Commissioning Group and GP surgeries.

Councillor Okunade questioned whether landowners and property owners that were stakeholders had been identified. The Highways England Representative hoped that this had been fully completed, though there may be some whose property or land lay just outside the redline boundary that had not yet been contacted.

Highways England also held a profile sheet on Thurrock Council, as with all the major Local Authorities affected by the proposal, which was important for strong and direct engagement. Highways England had recently appointed a sole representative responsible for the interests of Thurrock Council, Ian Kennard, who would attend meetings of the Task Force moving forward.

Councillor Jones asked if the aim was to deliver objectives to the Council and local residents. Adjustments could be made taking on board issues concerning the local area.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative questioned how there could be a positive outcome with a route through Thurrock, given it was already one of the worst polluted areas with high levels of cardiovascular disease and cancer. The Highways England Representative advised that stationary traffic led to poor air quality therefore air quality should improve. Air Quality was a national issue and motorists needed to be smarter in their movements. A more detailed answer required the baseline to be completed and measured against the correct data but Highways England had already agreed to work with Thurrock giving joint instructions to consultants.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative highlighted that £10m had been spent on the current crossing. 86% of traffic was expected to remain and 14% would not reduce the traffic sufficiently to 'get Thurrock moving'. The proposed Lower Thames Crossing would do nothing to alleviate the stagnated M25 and problems at the Dartford Crossing. The Highways England Representative assured the Task Force that ways to help the existing crossing were being explored and there was a need to look at the wider network as a mature operator. The Department for Transport was also considering funding methods and a full commitment would be required to enable the road network to work all the time.

Councillor Allen requested that Thurrock be the first to know details of development within its boundary, including clarification of further steps so Councillors could keep residents fully informed and advised. Highways England should also consider sharing information through the local papers, social media and other methods.

The Resident Representative questioned how many roads in Thurrock were managed by Highways England. She noted that the table regarding air quality excluded any roads directly managed by Highways England and, given the high number of heavily congested roads within Thurrock which were managed

by Highways England, this data was a misnomer. She also requested that the information be made more understandable for local residents. The Highways England Representative agreed that information needed to be accessible and understandable, therefore as much analysis as was necessary would be undertaken to ensure this was the case.

The Vice-Chair stressed the serious situation around air quality, as the borough was the worst outside London. He continued that tunnelling was common in London and requested that Thurrock be given the same level of mitigation in areas of major population. The welfare of residents was a key responsibility and junctions elevated to 10m would not look after them. He asked that Highways England seriously consider redesigning the scheme so that the interchange would be underground.

Councillor Jones queried whether the traffic data regarding the A13 was up to date. Thurrock was often gridlocked at present and he felt that this problem would extend further into Essex if the crossing were to go ahead. The A13 was under a lot of pressure and the data around freight movements and London Gateway Operations were still required. The traffic model data was still incomplete and thus could not be released but once it was complete the aim was to offer relieve on the A13 and in the centre of Grays.

The Chair stressed that the Task Force and all elected Councillors, had a duty to residents and therefore would leave no stone unturned regarding proposals. Highways England aimed to ensure the scheme had as low an impact as possible and reminded the Task Force that the design was not final, there was need to listen to residents, the Council and other stakeholders to ensure the right solution.

The Highways England representatives outlined the design scheme including locations of cuttings, elevations and junctions. Councillor Jones queried the route through Tilbury and East Tilbury. The original scheme for the preferred route through Tilbury, East Tilbury and Linford had been higher. Now everything was ground level or lower with the exception of elevated sections crossing the Tilbury loop and Linford Road. Councillor Jones questioned whether tunnelling had been considered to address the visual impact, it had not at this stage.

The Resident Representative noted that the proposed areas to be in cutting were mainly in those areas with low population figures. She expressed the view that Highways England only seemed to mention Tilbury, and had paid no heed to communities of East Tilbury, West Tilbury and Linford which would see elevated sections in close proximity to residential properties. She asked why the route could not be tunnelled in those sections which passed by homes. Highways England were also considering these options as part of the design process, a model would help to make the design clearer and easier to understand.

Councillor Little noted the massive change in the proposed design since the last iteration seen by the Council. Some of the changes were pleasing but he

felt there was still a long way to go. He recognised that if the final decision was that the crossing should go ahead the Council should work to ensure the scheme had as little impact as possible on the local communities. He sought assurances that local roads, bridleways, cycle paths and similar routes would not be cut off. The Highways England Representative confirmed that all existing routes would have crossings to maintain access.

The Chair noted that a new tunnel had been announced as part of the design, though it was outside of Thurrock.

The Vice-Chair interjected that it might be helpful for the large-scale map to be emailed to Members. He was surprised by the proposal for crossing the railway at East Tilbury and added that, like those in London, tunnels would save the issues of up and down, and the impact on residents and the environment. He noted that 14% of traffic was expected to divert from the existing crossing however with 6,000 trucks coming from developments in Tilbury most would opt for the new crossing over Dartford. It would be impossible to provide an answer until the traffic modelling was complete, as a natural shift was expected for some traffic from the existing crossing but also there would be new movements not yet in place.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative sought clarification regarding the proposed interchange at Orsett, which appeared very complicated with elevated and lowered sections. He asked how local connections could remain intact. The amended scheme ensured that Baker Street would no longer be cut off and saw a roundabout introduced near Orsett to connect the A1013 and the A1089. The aim was to keep local connections separate from key points. The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative raised his concern about linking the A1089, albeit potentially declassified, with Stanford Road and urged Highways England to work to prevent the route being used as an 'escape point' in the event of accidents on the wider network.

The Chair also expressed concern regarding the net effect of the new crossing, which would see Thurrock entrapped between two routes and creating a huge problem of cross-borough traffic.

Councillor Allen felt the scheme would be devastating to Thurrock, both in terms of the visual impact and health factors. It risked driving a stake through the heart of the borough's areas of natural beauty and historic significance. He asked what mitigations would be in place for the elevated sections. He felt that acoustic fencing should be a minimum requirement but also requested that in areas of high population cut and cover be in place to reduce both noise pollution and impact on air quality. The Highways England Representative outlined that they had a duty to mitigate against all impacts and the scheme could provide benefits through local engagement. Much could be done to lessen the impact and enhance areas around infrastructure, providing an opportunity to invest in the future.

The Chair requested that large scale maps be provided to each elected Member of the Council and continued to question plans for the route across the Orsett fens. The design currently featured a simple structure though there was a minimum height for maintenance and to ensure traffic could still flow in adverse conditions, as the area was a flood plain. The Chair asked what height the structure would be and was informed that it would stand 5.5m above ground level.

Councillor Little urged Highways England to be explicit that proposals were not currently fixed and final to avoid a risk of miscommunication with residents. Highways England confirmed they were happy to share the current map but with the caveat that it was not set in stone. They hoped to find an appropriate way to display details of the scheme to everyone but there were questions about how to ensure everyone could see it. A virtual reality model would allow for improved understanding of elevations and sightlines, but not everyone had digital access. Thurrock Council's assistance would be welcomed in finding the best solution.

The Vice-Chair welcomed these assurances. He mentioned that parts of the A13 were covered with 'quiet tarmac' and asked whether it would be used for most of the route for the proposed crossing. The Task Force was assured that much could be done through civil engineering to make a scheme pleasing and low-noise surfacing was a Highways England standard.

Councillor Allen raised concern around the impact of construction and sought assurances that no works would be undertaken outside of normal working hours Monday to Friday to cause as little disruption as possible to residents. No definite commitment could be given around the construction of the tunnel itself but Highways England would work closely with the Council to achieve the best outcome for Thurrock.

The Representatives from Highways England left the meeting at this point.

24. Council's Proposed Response to Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report

The Corporate Director of Place introduced the report. At the previous meeting of the Task Force Members had covered the areas that mattered most to Thurrock. The Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report had been received by the Council on 2 November 2017 and a response from Thurrock Council was to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate within 28 days.

The Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues gave a brief presentation which outlined the purpose of the scoping report, how it had been reviewed and key areas of note.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative noted there were three Grade 2 listed buildings by the proposed Orsett junction and asked what protections were afforded to them. The EIA Scoping Report had shown that

these were being assessed correctly but full details would not be known until the full Environmental Impact Assessment was completed. The Independent Technical Advisor on Environmental Issues expressed that it was more worrying that a scheduled monument would be dug up at Orsett, yet no reference was made to this within the scoping report.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative queried whether the 2km assessment for visual impact would be 1km from the centreline in either direction, or whether the 2km would be in both directions from the centreline. It was confirmed that the assessment area would cover 2km in either direction from the centreline of the proposed carriageway.

The Vice-Chair queried whether Highways England would be advised of the number of populous in areas of high population. This would be taken into account as part of the air quality assessment and significant weighting would be applied accordingly.

Councillor Little stated that he was impressed by the number of evidence-based objections that had been put forward. Section 3.61 of the report advised that Tilbury Energy Centre should be included within the assessment of cumulative effects and suggested that the response also note that DP World was not currently working at full capacity and therefore its traffic figures were still due to increase.

Councillor Allen questioned whether there was a clear trend within the air quality data within Thurrock over the past 20 years. The Task Force was advised that levels decreased quite quickly in the early years and then plateaued somewhat. The Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) still needed to be in place but levels were coming down overall. Councillor Little added that there were 17 AQMAs in Thurrock and it had been proposed to remove 7, however they would remain in place given the potential crossing.

The Chair noted that section 3.14 of the report advised that the DEFRA's Emission Factor Toolkit was likely to underestimate emissions and sought further explanation. The Task Force was advised that it was widely known that the toolkit underestimated PM2.5 and PM10, however methods were available to uplift figures to worse-case scenarios and this had been requested. The issue was beyond the realms of the software in use.

Councillor Okunade queried who would be the judge of whether mitigation was sufficient, as per 3.8 of the report. The Independent Technical Advisor for Environmental Issues clarified that if modelling suggested any worsening in noise levels and air quality the plan would need to be amended to mitigate those issues however it was the responsibility of the applicant not the statutory consultees to consider these issues.

The Resident Representative asked whether there was any significance to the fact that the DEFRA figures excluded roads managed by Highways England. The Independent Technical Advisor for Environmental Issues could not comment from the Council's perspective but would look into the matter further.

Councillor Little queried the mention of 'materials' but no section on 'construction'. The noise, vibration and air quality impact from lorries over a construction period of six years would be huge. The Task Force heard that data regarding vehicle movements would be captured within the remit of air quality and noise pollution. Details of the impact of the construction specifically had been requested but Highways England were looking into using the river and railways to deliver materials in an attempt to reduce vehicle movements.

Councillor Jones questioned why the scoping report did not fully justify the reason for the route chosen. Members were advised that the decision process would have been well documented however it had not been clearly brought out within the scoping report.

The Thames Crossing Action Group Representative stressed the need for joined up thinking at this stage to ensure issues within Thurrock, such as power networks and AQMAs by the dock, were properly addressed. He could think of no way to mitigate against 60,000 extra vehicles in the borough, bar continuous tunnelling. The Chair expressed quiet confidence that officers were experienced and would be on top of the situation. The Corporate Director of Place agreed that the cumulative impact of everything happening needed to be assessed. The traffic modelling data would take into account all extra development within the area up to 2026/2027.

The Chair noted that within the responses from technical advisors the question of the A14 route versus Route 3 was raised which showed a weakness in the scope.

Councillor Jones sought further information around the potential hazardous historic landfill at Goshem's Farm. The site predated restrictive legislation therefore could contain anything and there was a need to consider whether the impact of the development could cause hazardous chemicals to permeate.

The Chair summarised that Officers should revisit the scoping report to see if there was anything else to uncover to strengthen the Council's response. The proposal had been updated to include additional tunnelling outside of the borough so reasonably the same could be done within Thurrock and there were real concerns around the height of elevated sections.

Councillor Allen felt that Highways England were only focusing on the cost of the scheme without considering the health and wellbeing of Thurrock residents. He noted that the red line boundary covered a Victorian tip in Tilbury and questioned whether the proposed route would cut straight through. Details around portals were still very vague; both on the North and South side of the river, and this could be part of the reason for that.

The Chair noted that the A13 widening works had uncovered sites of archaeological significance, and given the scheduled monument already raised asked whether Mucking Excavation Group, the British Museum or other

agencies had been contacted to see what could be done. It was confirmed that the feedback from the archaeological specialist advised there were sites of national significance and the area had been on their radar for some time.

25. Work Programme

The Democratic Services Officer advised that the update listed for December would go to Cabinet rather than General Services Committee.

Councillor Little declared that he, and the other Members of the Task Force had received a letter from Stephen Metcalfe MP offering his assistance if required.

Councillor Rice requested that Officers liaise with Highways England to ensure Members received copies of the large-scale maps as agreed earlier in the meeting.

The Thames Crossing Action Group invited Members to their meeting to be held on Sunday, to reinforce the strength and show of united support within Thurrock for their cause.

The meeting finished at 8.30 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**